

Exploring the Aspect of Silencing of Subaltern Voices and Marginalization Through Textual Analysis of Water (2006) By Bapsi Sidhwa

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Abstract

This research examines Bapsi Sidhwa's *Water* (2006) through a postcolonial lens to explore its representation of subaltern women in colonial India. Basically the research explores by focusing on widows residing in a religious ashram, that how the novel depicts their experiences while exposing the systemic techniques of suppression and marginalization. The research states of employing Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak theory, Sidhwa portrays these women as experiencing double repression due to patriarchal dominance, religious traditions that are firm, and neglect of colonial authorities. The depiction of widowhood as societal death, intensified by economic exploitation, the effects of caste systems and ceremonial isolation. While the colonial context offers some background, it fails to confront these injustices, while worsen the women' plight. . By placing the experiences of the widows at the crossroads of patriarchy, religion, and imperialism, this study adds to the wider conversation on postcolonial literature and feminist theory, stressing the ongoing difficulty of representing marginalized voices.

Keywords: *Water, Bapsi Sidhwa, subaltern, postcolonial literature, patriarchy, colonial India, silencing, marginalization*

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Introduction

Water (2006) is a novel by Bapsi Sidhwa that investigates themes of uneven gendered positions, male dominated environment and the plight of widows in colonial India, through the story of widows living in Ashram where they faced multiple problems and are kept silent on the issue of their lives. Water (2006) depicts the silencing of women and their marginalization. It will help us to explore the complexities of widowhood and to understand the novel's exploration of gender, power and caste system in a new and intuitive way. This analysis will help us in exploring the theme of silencing in male dominant societies of colonial India. The study furnishes to postcolonial and feminist literary discourse by critically evaluating a novel that deals with multiple layers of marginalization. By focusing on Water (2006), the research sheds light on a rarely explored aspect of South Asian history and literature: the ritualistic silencing of widows and their resistance within oppressive systems. It also adds to the body of work interrogating whether elite authors can authentically represent the subaltern or if such attempts risk replicating hegemonic silencing.

Problem Statement

Despite the wealth of postcolonial literary analysis available, subaltern women, especially those silenced by intersecting structures of colonialism, patriarchy, and religious orthodoxy remain inadequately represented in critical discourse. Water uniquely presents a literary space where the widowed women 'voices deemed socially irrelevant, are brought into focus. However, a significant gap is found in exploring how these voices function within postcolonial theory, and whether they genuinely represent subaltern agency or remain filtered through elite narration.

This study addresses the question

To what extent does Water effectively portray the voices of marginalized community within the context of postcolonial theory?

Research Objectives

The study aims:

1. To investigate Water through the framework of postcolonial theory, with a particular emphasis on the concept of the subaltern.
2. To assess how Bapsi Sidhwa illustrates the themes of marginalization, oppression, and resistance experienced by Hindu widows in colonial India.
3. To investigate how gender, religion, and colonialism interact to influence the formation of subaltern identities.
4. To determine whether Sidhwa's narrative gives space for subaltern voices to be heard, or if these voices are filtered through

the perspectives of external (elite or Western) viewpoints.

Research Questions:

1. How does *Water* depict the lived experiences of subaltern women in colonial India?
2. In what manner does the novel illustrate the processes of marginalization and silencing?
3. How are the combined pressures of patriarchy, religion, and colonialism portrayed within the novel?
4. Does the narrative give subaltern voices a platform, or does it perpetuate their silence?

Brief Summary of Novel

An overview of *Water* (2006) by Bapsi Sidhwa, framed by its postcolonial setting and concerns: Set in 1938, during the final years of the British Raj, *Water* begins with the abrupt and confusing experience of widowhood for eight years old Chuyia, who marries as a child and becomes a widow before fully comprehending what marriage entails. Her family, adhering to traditional customs, brings her to a decaying widow ashram along the banks of the Ganges. The ashram is under the control of Madhumati, a domineering matriarch who imposes a strict code of renunciation shaved heads, white saris, and severe austerity while secretly exploiting the younger widows to maintain financial stability. In this confined environment, Chuyia encounters a small group of women who profoundly influence her perceptions of loss, faith, and resilience.

Chuyia, Shakuntala and Kalyani are the widows who are at the forefront of the novel, Kalyani the only widow permitted to retain her hair is gorgeous young woman, and constrained into sex work for upholding the ashram; being a visible indicator of her distinction lengthy hair serves as both the “asset” that enhances her demand. Shakuntala, a reflective and pious widow who adheres to rituals while grappling with distressed scruples. They are surrounded by the individuals that highlight the ashram’s unclear association to the outside world: Gulabi, a hijra who secretly facilitates “appointments” for Madhumati; Brahman clients located on the other bank of the river; and there is a paradoxical acceptance for widows as a constant in daily life residents who accept the presence of the widows as an everyday reality, perceiving them as neither fully visible nor entirely human.

The story takes a buoyant spin when Kalyani comes across Narayan, who is driven by Mahatma Gandhi's call for societal reforms an idealistic law student of an upper caste background. The introduction of the idea about widow remarriage actually comes from their meetings by the riverbank attributes a cautious dialogue, exemplify a soft romance. The truth of a life that it enlarges past enforced lamentation. For Chuyia their

nascent love depicts a glance into reality where sympathy and self-determination are achievable.

For Kalyani it blemishes the first true offer of respect she has received since her segregation. Shakuntala by noticing this expansion, she starts to reassume the ethics of customs that validate suffering however, the society model that uplift the town's patriarchal sequence and the ashram's economy rapidly revives. When Narayan proposes her to marry, Kalyani is bold enough to picture freedom. Gulabi alerts of results, Madhumati locks her up out of fear of losing her assets and power, and the river which is the source of both profit and purification sets off the quarreled area between desire and foundation.

In a distressing admittance, Kalyani comes to know about father of Narayan as one of her regular clients. The hypocrisy of respectable patriarchy reveals through this exposure, a widow's sexual labor is being bought the same home that values purity. Unable to patch up her love with the stain placed upon her, Kalyani sinks into despair and ultimately drowns.

In the novel, Kalyani's unexpected death acts as a crucial turning point, shifting subtle hope into grief and resentment. The ashram loses its main source of income, and in her desperate attempt to restore its finances, Madhumati targets the most vulnerable option, Chuyia. The young girl is sold to a wealthy patron and exploited, a horrifying act that underscores the troubling rationale of the system; when tradition is twisted, even a child's innocence can be commodified. Sidhwa depicts this brutality without sensationalizing it; the true horror lies in how the adults surrounding Chuyia accept and obscure it. For Shakuntala, this marks a definitive rupture. The faith that once offered her security now propels her toward taking ethical action.

However the social structure that supports the town's patriarchal order and the ashram's economy quickly returns. When Narayan proposes Kalyani, she boldly considers the possibility of gaining her freedom.. Gulabi warns of what will happen, and Madhumati locks her up because she is afraid of losing her money and power. The river, which is the source of both profit and purification, becomes the battleground between desire and prohibition. Kalyani learns that Narayan's father is one of her regular customers, which breaks her heart. The discovery shows how duplicitous respectable patriarchy is: the same home that values purity buys a widow's sexual labour. Kalyani becomes so sad that she drowns because she can't find a way to love herself despite the stain on her.

The book's final movement threads personal rescue into public transition. Learning that Gandhi will pass through the local station, Shakuntala makes a radical choice. She lifts Chuyia being traumatized, barely responsive to the outside of the ashram's grasp and carries her into the possibility of a different future. On the platform, surrounded by a crowd eager to see Gandhi, Shakantula approaches Narayan ,who

discouraged by his duties of his father and has embraced Gandhian principles. She entrusts Chuyia to him, silently wishing that the minor girl be brought to safety with Gandhi's supporters. The train departs, taking Chuyia towards a horizon free from ritualistic oppression, while Shakuntala stands at the brink of her own unexplored upheaval boldness. Through post colonial perspective, Water rejects simple binaries of colonizer versus colonized. It reveals a "colonizer within" the web of caste, religion and gender rules that discipline women's lives. The British existence is felt as backdrop and model but Sidhwa's argument is that political independence without social reform would leave the subaltern still voiceless. The romantic story of Kalyani is not merely a personal sorrow; it serves as an example of whether nationalism can address its own patriarchal entanglements. Chuyia's destiny, placed in the hands of a train carrying Gandhi, serves not merely as a sentimental salvation but rather as a profound inquiry into the feasibility of moral change.

Sidhwa's writing formally reflects the limited world of widows, household settings, river crossings, overheard whispers, and ritual routines are the textures through which power is exercised and resisted. Silence is mainly what widows cannot say what society refuses to hear and becomes part of the storytelling grammar. When speech does break through (Shakuntala's quiet arguments with priests, Narayan's reformist talk), it is tentative and contingent, never guaranteed to change outcomes. The river itself works as a metaphor of ambivalence; it cleanses and drowns, sustains the ashram and swallows Kalyani.

In summary, "Water" is a compact and striking story about a life limited by convention in the twilight of empire. Its detailed descriptions of the ashram and its economy, punishments, small kindnesses and betrayals make visible the mechanisms of everyday oppression. By aligning the reader with Chuyia's uncomprehending gaze, Kalyani's doomed hope, and Shakuntala's awakening conscience, Sidhwa crafts a narrative that indicts both colonial rule and the home grown hierarchies that outlive it. The ending offers no easy victory, only the hard-won possibility that one child might step onto a different track.

Literature Review

The section includes a re-examine of the present literature and the research that has already been published. Furthermore, it provides a brief description of the important terms used in the article and the selected theoretical perspective. In this chapter, the already published articles related to the selected area of study have been reviewed to identify the research gap that needs to be addressed.

Postcolonial Literature

Post colonialism involves examining race, ethnicity, traditions, cultures

and distinctiveness in the period following independence, predominantly after number of colonized countries got freedom. It is intimately connected to imperialism, which began with colonization and continues into the present time. The expression "imperialism," originating from the 'imperium,' encompasses definitions like power, control, and kingdom (Habib737). Postcolonialism explores connections amid the 'colonizer' and the Latin 'colonized.' Historically, European nations held away over vast regions globally, with the British realm governing more than one fourth of the planet's terrain, implying that one in four individuals were subjected to Queen Victoria's rule. Postcolonial artistic and literary expressions developed within nations including India, Australia, Nigeria, Sri Lanka and Senegal subsequent their autonomy. Edward Said's significant work, *Orientalism* examines Western depictions of Eastern societies which continues to be a foundational text in postcolonial studies. Nations such as Canada and Australia, identified as 'settler' countries, belong to the British Commonwealth. Prominent postcolonial authors like Chinua Achebe, Salman Rushdie, J.M. Coetzee, Michael Ondaatje, Frantz Fanon, Derek Walcott, Jamaica Kincaid, Isabel Allende, and Eavan Boland examine the dynamics between colonizers and the colonized in their writings, such as *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *Midnight's Children* (1981), *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), *Disgrace* (1999), and *The English Patient* (1992). Key themes in postcolonial literature include racism, cultural supremacy, racial discrimination, identity struggles, hybridity and inequality. These themes replicate the intricate connections between colonizers and the colonized. Colonizers often justified their rule through claims of racial superiority, as seen in the example of apartheid in South Africa.. Linguistic code was furthermore a powerful tool of control, with colonizers imposing their language on colonized peoples. Postcolonial writers often blend local and colonial languages to create an amalgam form, reflecting the split individuality of the colonized.

Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial studies constantly give emphasis to sexual category, specifically while coping with the effects of the majestic progression on women. By both native power and colonized structures, it is a common conception that women in the peopled culture ache from victimization. The problem centred on the actuality that women undergo the oppression put forward the antagonists of the nationalist struggling in the same pace. It is evidently important for the women that they had to fight the doubly marginalization of masculine sovereignty in its local as well as its regal settings. (Young 379)

Concepts of Edward Said, Homi k Bhabha and Frantz Fanon

The prominent key figure from the twentieth-century Frantz Fanon and

Edward Said deeply shaped postcolonial theory and decolonial thought. Edward Said is called the father of Post colonialism and one of the most high-ranking theorists of his time, while Frantz Fanon explorer of the psychological impact of colonialism. A legendary writer and culture philosopher Said and Fanon, a psychiatrist and revolutionary scrutinized the deep-seated system of colonialism and their encountered property on custom, politics and recognition. Through cultural critique, Said and through psychological and political analysis, Fanon, both sought to uncover colonial prosecution and proposed routes to liberation.

Homi Bhabha developed cultural presentation on Said's analysis and address main ideas for example hybridity and the "third space" on Fanon's investigation of identity. Bhabha addressed in "The Location of Culture" that colonial encounter create mixed identities, destroying the binary dissimulate between colonizers and colonized.

Subaltern Key concept

The term "subaltern" derives by an Italian Marxist thinker. Antonio Gramsci, who deputed this to describe groups in society who are politically, socially, and economically marginalized those without access to dominance authority structures .In Gramsci's sense, the subaltern is the "non-elite," often lacking a political voice. In the postcolonial context, the term was popularized by The Subaltern Studies Group (1979-1980s), the group of Subcontinents scholars like Ranajit Guha, and later expanded by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

A postcolonial theorist and literacy critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak took out Fanon and Edward Said to extend her powerful thought of the subaltern, oppressed persons silenced both in patriarchal and colonial hierarchies. In the article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), she evacuated the Western thinkers for stating in the name of persecute instead functioning their voices to born. With Said's analysis she elaborated civilizing illustration of accentuating how state policy divided with gender. Spivak's contribution in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's famous composition argues that the subaltern cannot speak in a sense of being authentically heard within the structures of dominant power. When elites (colonial or native) "give voice" to the subaltern, they often reframe it to fit their own perspectives. Subaltern women (e.g., widows, lower caste women) in colonial India were doubly marginalized by colonial power and by indigenous patriarchy. **Spivak's work argues that the subaltern and marginalized groups excluded from power that cannot truly speak** because their

voices are always mediated or overwritten by dominant structures. She critiques Western intellectuals who claim to “give voice” to the oppressed, showing that this often reinforces their silencing. Focusing on the **subaltern woman**, Spivak uses the example of **Sati** to illustrate how both colonial and patriarchal forces erase her voice. Ultimately, the essay highlights the **structural barriers** that prevent authentic expression and warns against assuming that speaking for the subaltern is the same as letting them speak. Spivak, G. C. (pp. 271–313).

Postcolonial feminism

Contradict to Western feminism, postcolonial feminism as a contemporary movement aims to highlight the ordinary exertion faced by women of the Third world countries. This is basically the inventiveness of those activists and academics who are partially or entirely affiliated to once colonized nations.

The purpose of feminism in literature, Miti Pandey describes that in literature feminism indicates to a way of reaching a notebook with a primarily focused for the essence of women's experience in it. From a feminist view point the main concerns of female fiction authors comprise the characters fictitious experience, the author's intellectualizing, creative ability and the experience immanent in language that questions societal authorizations that vanquish, belittle and consider women as subsidiary existence. (Pandey 1989 p 9)

As Mohanty indicates that, “in the absence of the over determined discourse that develops the third World, there would be no first World” (Mohanty, 1988, p. 82). Except women of the third world, the particular self-representation of western women would be troublesome. Therefore, there is a silhouette of imperialism fields that fundamentals the contrast specifically of the “other” of resident women.

Women are affected absolutely or disapprovingly by economic growth policies for cross cultural contrast this is the basis. (Mohanty 1988)

Bapsi Sidhwa, a Postcolonial Writer

Bapsi Sidhwa, a Pakistani American novelist born in 1938, belonged to the Parsi Zoroastrian community. She primarily focuses on topics such as the colonial era in India, the historical events surrounding the Partition, the lives and stories of the Parsi community, and narratives of migrating from South Asia to the United States. *Water* was initially made as a film and then adopted into a novel. The writer of famous novel "Water" Bapsi Sidhwa's has a great admiration and exaltation for women who are primordial symbol of adversity and sacrifice. She is affectingly perplexed at everlasting and perennial problems of women. Through the track of

novel "Water" she has revealed her disappointment and dissatisfaction at the condition of women specifically widows. In her novel "Water" she has strived to force her readers to think about and perceive the pitiful condition of widows in our society. In this novel she has briefly encapsulated up deploring and silenced state of the South Asian widows.

Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Water* serves as a poignant narrative that not only tells the story of young widows in colonial India but also intricately weaves the complexities of postcolonial identity, particularly through the lens of double marginalization. The term "subaltern" has been defined by scholars such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. It refers to people who are socially, politically, and geographically marginalized beyond existing boundaries. Hegemonic power structure. In this context, the novel reveals the silence imposed on women. Especially those affected by inflexible social conventions after the death of their husbands.

Research Gap

The existing *Water* studies (2006) address issues of patriarchy, widowhood, and religious orthodoxy, there is limited exploration of how the novel explicitly represents the silencing of subaltern voices (Rasel A, 2024) and the structural impossibility of marginalized women to speak. This study fills this gap to apply subaltern theory by showing how Bapsi Sidhwa's story challenges the lack of voice and agency of widowed women in regal India.

Theoretical Framework

This research applies an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that brings together Postcolonial Theory, Subaltern Theory, and Feminist Literary Criticism to examine *Water* (2006) by Bapsi Sidhwa. These frameworks collectively deal with the historical, political, and gendered dimensions of the widows' marginalization in colonial India.

Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theory examines the cultural, political, and social repercussions of colonial command and its persistent effects after freedom (Said, 1978; Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2002). According to Indian framework, postcolonial analysis uncovers how British colonialism cohabitated with and often strengthened the indigenous system of oppression. The novel *Water* by Bapsi Sidhwa is set in 1938, when India was under British rule, meanwhile nationalist movements earned drive, on the other hand lives of widows stayed intact by these political shifts. Following Edward Said's impression of colonial "othering" process, the

widows can be seen as "others" within the colonized residents itself is omitted not only from colonial authority but also from nationalist debate.

Said E.W. (1978) *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon Ashcrof B, Griffiths G .and Tiffin H (2002).*The Empire Writers Back*, London: Routledge

Subaltern Theory

The term "subaltern", originating with Antonio Gramsci and further developed by the Subaltern Studies Group, denotes individuals relegated beyond political representation (Guha, 1982). "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), the essay by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) is vital for this study, as it argues that subaltern voices are often mediated or silenced by leading discourse, making genuine representation difficult. In *Water*, widows like Shakuntala, Kalyani, and Chuyia are "double subalterns" marginalized by both local patriarchal, caste-bound traditions and colonial power. Even when they speak, as Kalyani does in expressing her need for love, their words rarely reach a position of social authority, reflecting Gayatri Spivak's contention that speech of the subaltern is frequently unheard or reframed.

Guha, R. (1982). *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. Delhi: Oxford University Press

Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the Subaltern Speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (pp. 271–313). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Feminist Literary Criticism

Feminist criticism investigates literature's significance in reflecting and forming gender relations, focusing on depiction of women, their authority, and their socio-cultural forces constraining them (Showalter, 1985; Moi, 1985). The female characters in *Water* are directed by patriarchal power, religious orthodoxy, and economic manipulation. Sidhwa's portrayal of the widows' personal experiences counters the homogenization of Third World women as passive victims, aligning with Mohanty's critique. However, the novel also highlights the structural limits to their empowerment, showing liberation as mediated rather than self-determined, as seen in Kalyani's suicide and Chuyia's reliance on male reformers.

Showalter, E. (1985). *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*. New York: Pantheon.

Moi, T. (1985). *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London: Routledge.

Mohanty, C. T. (1988). Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses. *Feminist Review*, (30, 61–88).

Integration of Theories

By combining these three frameworks, the analysis captures **the intersectional nature** of oppression in *Water*: Postcolonial theory situates the widows within the political context of colonial India, revealing how imperialism intersects with indigenous traditions. Subaltern theory emphasizes their voicelessness and the mediation of their narratives by dominant social actors. Feminist criticism exposes the gender-specific mechanisms of control marriage, widowhood, sexuality that structure their lives. This triangulated approach allows for a nuanced reading that not only critiques colonialism but also challenges internal patriarchal systems, aligning with the broader goal of postcolonial feminism to address “the colonizer within.”

Methodology:

This specific research is qualitative in nature, as the characters in the novel “*Water*” are analyzed through the researcher’s perception of the novel in accordance with the theoretical perspective i.e. in light of the theory of postcolonial analysis presented. In the Qualitative method inductive approach is used that begins through observing circumstances and then move along to find aspects in the form of classifications or ideas that come out. The patterns that are found in the selected novel “*Water*” align with view point of Bapsi’s through postcolonial lens. The research focuses on using inductive way of thinking for viewing the events and characters in the “*Water*” through postcolonial lens.

Population and Sampling

This research work is based on the analysis of marginalized community of widows presented in *Novel Water*(2006)by BapsiSidhwa. The technique for selection of Population and Sampling is total population sampling. The selected population and Sample includes the widows from certain fictional works.

Instruments of Data Collection: The primary resource of data gathering is the novel itself .The selected two primary sources for data collection of this research consists: Post Colonial theory,“ Can Subaltern speak?” A post colonial feminism and the novel *Water* (2006) .The secondary sources for data include: journals articles, definitions, websites and novels.

Technique of data analysis

In **Gayatri ChakravortySpivak’s** view that women in hegemonic society are voiceless and their voices remained unheard even if they speak. This research explores the subaltern aspects of Women in patriarchal society of India through textual Analysis of the novel “*Water*” to bring out its emphasis. Textual analysis through a theoretical lens allows for depth and nuance, which are essential for postcolonial feminist.

Analysis and Discussion

This chapter provides a documented investigation of Bapsi Sidhwa's *Water* through lenses of postcolonial literary criticism, subaltern theory, and postcolonial feminism. The analysis focuses on how the novel represents the marginalized voices of Hindu widows, interrogates structures of patriarchy and religious orthodoxy, and explores the possibility (or failure) of the subaltern to speak. The chapter is divided thematically to highlight key elements of subaltern silencing, agency, resistance, and narrative voice. Published in 2006, a fiction *Water* by Bapsi Sidhwa features the society of the subsequent sovereign of British India. *Water* novel crystal clearly sets manipulation in the centring to an eight-year old protagonist kid Chuyia, the descendant of Bhagya and Somnath. The protagonist Chuyia, a minor-bride heads to a widow ashram at Banaras in the age of eight after her fifty year old husband Hira Lal's death. *Water*, the novel unfolds sufferings of a woman in patriarchal society by highlighting the dark aspect of mentally and physically shattered women forced into widow ashrams in opposition to their willingness. Like others protagonist in the novel Chuyia face the substandard treatment taking into account as her fate. Her entrance at the ashram signifies the ritualistic silencing of women, a theme that echoes Spivak's assertion that "the subaltern cannot speak" within hegemonic structures. The ashram serves both as a physical and a symbolic space of isolation, where widows are relegated to the fringes of society. Their marginalization which keeps them silent and invisible, is a result of both colonial and patriarchal norms and religious beliefs.

To adhere the standards of passivity and silence, they are permitted to be there. Our research examines postcolonial feminist analysis which highlights how the novel "Water" considers the interconnectedness of oppression that leads to the marginalization of widows.

This marginalization is not only due to gender but also inclined by religious tenet and social order hierarchy. In the novel, character like Shakuntala who is older and more meditative, struggle within a system that justifies their sufferings through religious texts.

The title "Water" serves as a dominant symbol in the novel. The Ganges River is depicted as both sacred and polluted, representing the contradiction in how widows are seen as pure yet treated as vulnerable. Rain and bathing are often linked with purification, symbolizing transitions for characters like Kalyani and Chuyia. As they navigate the tensions between religion and reform, purity and impurity, visibility and erasure, the widows embody identities that are fluid and unstable, much like ever changing surface of water.

In “Water” Bapsi Sidhwa challenges Brahmanical patriarchy, depicting how sacred scriptures are used to sustain the subjugation of women. The character of Kalyani, a young widow forced into prostitution to support the ashram, illustrates the complex intersection of caste and purity. Her exploitation and public humiliation reveal how her body is commercialized to support the moral facade of a society that excludes her.

Despite the oppressive setting, “Water”(2006) presents a subtle yet significant expression of female agency and resistance. Shakuntala, who initially follows religious norms, undergoes significant ideological change. Influenced by reformist ideas and growing disillusionment, she begins to critically examine the structures that limit her. This transformation aligns with key principles of postcolonial feminist theory, where awareness fosters resistance even in a restrictive environment. Similarly, Kalyani’s act of helping Chuyia escape demonstrates moral defiance, depicting that even oppressed individuals can act against oppression.

As Shakuntala begins to question the traditions of widowhood, she reflects on the fair treatment she has always desired. When she says “The scriptures say a good widow lives in penance and dies in purity”, religion is used by patriarchal elites to justify gender hierarchies. A postcolonial feminist analysis reveals that women’s oppression is often normalized. Sidhwa’s perspective goes beyond gender, inviting an exploration of class and caste system in relation to colonial power structures.

The character of Kalu, a low caste figure (dog) who interacts with the widows, contrasts with more privileged classes represented by other characters. Kalu’s marginalization due to his caste highlights how within the postcolonial analysis, multiple identities can lead to compounded discrimination and silence. Through Kalu, Sidhwa brings attention to the voices of those doubly marginalized, calling for intersectional awareness in both historical and contemporary discussions about agency and voice.

From a subaltern studies perspective, a key question is whether Water allows subalterns to speak for themselves, or whether their voices are mediated by elite authorship. Subalterns are people excluded from dominant narratives, institutions, and decision-making. Their stories are often told about them rather than by them. Power and Silence: Structural oppression means the subaltern cannot easily “speak” in the public sphere; even when they do, their voice is often mediated, distorted, or ignored.

The story is written by Bapsi Sidhwa, a Western-educated, elite Parsi woman, and adapted from a film by Deepa Mehta, a diasporic director. Spivak’s critique is relevant here: even as the novel draws attention to marginalized lives, it does so through privileged voices. The narrative voice often maintains external observation, and the widows rarely express philosophical interiority that they are acted upon more than

acting. For example, Chuyia's final departure is orchestrated not by her will, but by others who "rescue" her. So the novel exposes injustice, the subaltern widow's voice remains partially submerged in narrative mediation. When Madhumati directs Kalyani to entertain a client from the upper caste she diverts critique onto tradition. Madhumati: "Your are lucky at least you are earning your keep." Kalyani: "By selling my body?" Madhumati: "This is how it has always been."

By a subaltern lense perspective, this interchange seizes the intersection of caste, gender and economic exploitation. A disagreement of Kalyani is unusual in the ashram which temporarily breaks shatter the silence but Madhumati's response to that re-establishes the "hegemony of custom" depicting how systematic oppression is balanced through generational conspiracy.

In a postcolonial reading of a text like Bapsi Sidhwa's *Water*(2006) **postcolonial lens** reveals how colonial India's political movements largely ignored marginalized women's issues. **Subaltern Lens** Focuses specifically on widows as **double subalterns** are oppressed by both the colonial state and local patriarchal/caste systems. The "silencing" of these widows illustrates Spivak's argument: their stories are mediated through reformers, religious authorities, or nationalist leaders never in their own unfiltered voice. In *Water* (2006) of Bapsi Sidhwa , silencing and marginalization of women is central to the narrative, echoing Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's assertion that "the subaltern cannot speak" within dominant social and political structures. The widows in the novel, trapped within the oppressive confines of the ashram, embody this condition as their voices are consistently suppressed, mediated, or dismissed by patriarchal and colonial systems. Kalyani's mourn that "We are widows, our lives are over". What use is a widow except to serve?" which reveals how immensely rooted these oppressive ideologies are. Kalyani's dialogues are less an expression of personal belief and more a mirror of the patriarchal and religious discussions that have shaped her identity, presenting how the subaltern woman becomes a keel for highlighted perspectives rather than an autonomous speaker. Likely, Chuyia a child widow presents the susceptibility of those whose voices are silenced even before they grow. When Madhumati informs her, "Your husband is dead, child. You belong here now". Chuyia's integrity and retaliation are overruled by authoritarian imposition. At this point Madhumati herself, despite being a victim of patriarchy, becomes its encourager, showing how subaltern women may reproduce the structures that silence them, Moreover proving Spivak's narrative that their speech cannot cut cross oppressive intervention.

One of the most introspective widow, Shakuntala courages to challenge the patriarchal and religious order when she inquires a priest, “But why should a woman undergo so for the rest of her entire life?” nonetheless this query of hers never receives a genuine response, illustrating how women’s voices, fail to alter hegemonic discourse even when spoken. Spivak’s theory is reflected at this moment that the subaltern’s speech does not achieve legitimacy because it is unheard within dominant systems of power. As an alternative, possibilities or reforms for change come through male mediation, as when Narayan, the reformist, tells the widows, “Gandhi says widows should be allowed to remarry.” Whilst the statement appears innovative, it highlights that how the liberation of widows is expressed all the way through male reformers rather than the women themselves. The liberation of the subaltern is framed throughout by male authority, reinforcing the status of women as subalterns who cannot speak on their own stipulations.

Drawn together, these moments present that Water dramatizes the problematic situation Spivak identifies the subaltern woman is doubly marginalized by colonial insouciance and indigenous patriarchy. Their voices are muted by both ritual deprivation and economic exploitation and also by the vary perspective structures that conciliate their encounters through male figures or symbolic acts instead of straight, raw speech. However, Sidhwa at the same time humanizes these women through posturing witness to their enduring and retaliation, making an awareness of their difficulty. Still, even within this depiction, the paradox rests while the novel raised their condition; it also assures that the subaltern cannot fully “speak.”

Conclusions: It gives an outlook on the silencing of subaltern voices of women. The research looks for the element of postcolonial analysis presented in “Water”. The research furthermore identifies the postcolonial causes in silencing subaltern voices of women and analyses “Water” as a postcolonial literature. In light of these objectives, this research addresses the question of to what extent does Water succeed in representing subaltern voices within a postcolonial framework? The second chapter of the article presents a review of an existing narrative related to the area of interest also discloses that the selected area of study for this research has not been examined. A theoretical framework is constructed to aid in the process of analyzing the text. This research sheds light on the textual analysis through postcolonial lens of Baps iSidwa’s Water uncovers a deeply bedded narrative that questions the silencing and marginalization of subaltern women specifically in the course of Water Hindu widows in colonized India. By the framework of postcolonial theory, subaltern studies, and also by postcolonial feminism this study scrutinized how

interesting systems of patriarchy, religion, caste and colonialism construct silencing and marginalization of women and gendered oppression, and challenging colonial narratives.

Moreover, Water(2006) critiques colonial narratives that often simplify or romanticize the struggles of the “exotic” eastern woman, revealing the complexity of their experiences. Sidhwa not only presents the efforts of her characters as sufferers, but she also depicts occasions of resilience and resistance. The scenes where Chandni participates in discussions about fate and freedom instances her growth awareness of her situation, finally positioning her not just as submissive victim but as a fragile character with the power to act freely. By her characters Sidhwa uproots the blend of caste, colonialism and gender, presenting that figures of silenced voices are neither singular nor uncomplicated. By engaging with the stories of individuals silenced by intersecting systems of power, Water encourages readers to reflect critically on these layered forms of oppression. Through a postcolonial theoretical framework that emphasizes double marginalization, Sidhwa compels an exploration of identity in all its complexity, offering a deeper understanding of the subaltern condition. Although set in a specific historical moment, the novel addresses concerns that remain deeply relevant today, ultimately affirming the necessity of amplifying marginalized voices. By foregrounding these narratives, Sidhwa both commemorates her characters’ experiences and critiques the persistence of marginalization within contemporary social discourse.

In *Water*, the widow particularly Chuyia, Kalyani, and Shakuntala embody the dual oppression identified by postcolonial feminist analysis, as they are constrained by both colonial authority structures and entrenched indigenous patriarchal traditions. While colonialism does not function as an overt antagonist in the novel, a postcolonial reading reveals its role in sustaining and legitimizing local systems of patriarchy.

Ultimately, *Water* serves as a vital space for recovering subaltern voices, compelling readers to confront the historical erasure of marginalized women while also investigating the politics of representation itself. By engaging with the burden of tradition and the limits of narrative authority, Sidhwa exposes and interrogates the struggles of the subaltern, reminding readers that within postcolonial contexts, the act of speaking is as politically charged as what is being spoken.

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